DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 077 338 HE 004 057

AUTHOR Ciampa, Bartholomew J.
TITLE College Attrition: A Cause Appraisal Technique.
INSTITUTION Nasson Coll., Springvale, Maine.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Disqualification; Dropout Attitudes; *Dropout Rate; *Higher Education; Questionnaires; Research; Research Projects; *Student Attitudes; *Transfers; Withdrawal

ABSTRACT

This report describes a unique institutional approach to study the causes of student attrition recently completed at Nasson College, Maine. The population of the study included all students who had been enrolled during the preceeding seven semesters and who subsequently withdrew or were dismissed for academic reasons. A questionnaire survey technique was employed with items designed to elicit responses in the areas of student personnel services, admissions effectiveness, and curriculum and instruction. The instrument was designed to identify the reasons which could contribute to a student's decision to withdraw; it was also intended to identify the college's assets from a student's perspective so that these strengths could be enhanced. Results indicated the attrition rate of Nasson College was found to be somewhat higher than similar types of 4-year institutions included in a national sample. The technique and instruments described in this study can, with minor adjustments, be broadly applied to institutions of higher learning that consider student attrition to be an actual or potential problem source. Related material and the survey instrument are included. (MJM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 077338

College Attrition: A Cause Appraisal Technique

by

Bartholomew J. Ciampa, Ph.D.
Director of Teacher Training and
Associate Professor of Education
Nasson College, Springvale, Maine

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

HE 004 057

Rationale: Many institutions of higher learning are currently experiencing an enrollment crisis as the direct result of a complexity of variables that seem to be operating in concert with one another. Such variables include, among others; rising tuition costs; personal financial pressure; decreased federal support; relaxed military draft laws[1]; the proliferation of accelerated and external degree programs; "University Without Walls" programs[2]; and the opportunity to obtain college level credit by special examination[3].

The reasons why students do not choose to enroll in a particular institution of higher learning are moot ones, to say the least. However, once a student enrolls in a given college or university, his early withdrawal or dismissal (which serve to emphasize the already existing enrollment predicament) is the subject of serious investigation.

Traditional approaches which were designed to investigate attrition are not as effective today as they have been in recent years because the current problem is much more complex than merely being able to utilize academic prediction scales as forecasting devices[4].

Consequently, new techniques are being formulated which serve to identify attrition causes through the application of multi-dimensional approaches[5]. (Such studies are usually undertaken on an intra-institutional basis because of conditions unique to each institution.)

A stop-gap solution which is considered by many college officials to be effective while attempting to reverse attrition trends concerns itself with increasing the number of transfer admissions to fill the void left by student withdrawals[6]. At best, this approach should be seen as temporary in the light of nationwide enrollment predictions for the remainder of the decade.

Study Format and Objectives: A unique institutional approach to study the causes of student attrition was recently completed at Nasson College, a private, non-sectarian liberal arts college of 850 students located in southern Maine. The scope of the study should enable it to be effectively applied at other colleges and universities.

The Task Force to Study Attrition was commissioned by the College President to include representatives from the office of academic administration (faculty representative), the offices of Admissions, Development, Student Personnel, and the Registrar's Office. Its specific charges were: to compare the student persistence rate at the College with national statistics; to determine the cause(s) of attrition; and to make recommendations to the College community which would ostensibly curtail student out-migration wherever remedial.

Sample: The population of the study included all students who had been enrolled during the preceeding seven semesters and who subsequently withdrew or were dismissed for academic reasons. For validation purposes the analysis of the students in the withdrawal category and the analysis of the students in the dismissed category were treated as separate entities.

Instrument: A questionnaire survey technique was employed with items designed to elicit responses in the areas of student personnel services, admissions effectiveness, and curriculum and instruction. Eighty-one statements were devised with provisions made for both open-ended and categorical responses. Categories included: a.) strongly agree; b.) agree; c.) disagree; d.) strongly disagree; and e.) no opinion.

For the most part, an effort was made to present each statement in a positive manner to ensure that respondents were not negatively prejudiced at the outset. It was also felt that a negative response to a positively presented statement would represent a clear and significant manifestation of negative student feeling.

Although the instrument was designed to identify the reasons which could contribute to a student's decision to withdraw, it was also intended to identify the College's assets from a student's perspective so that these strengths could be enhanced.

The survey "package" included an introductory letter from the President of the College; an instruction sheet; the questionnaire; and a prepaid return envelope.

Two subsequent follow-up mailings were made to non-respondents to increase the return percentages thereby improving the instrument's validity.

Findings: The attrition rate of the College in question was found to be somewhat higher than similar types of four-year institutions included in a national sample. This was especially true when the percentage of freshmen not returning for the sophomore year was examined[7].

After careful analysis of the data the Task Force made the following recommendations:

1. All general Nasson publications should be studied and carefully coordinated by a professionally staffed office of public relations to make certain that they accurately reflect what the College is really like. The projected image should be clearly understood by and acceptable to all members of the Nasson community. Furthermore, the attitude and professional conduct of all members of the faculty and administration should be consistent with the projected philosophy (small college concept).
2. The admissions interview and campus tour is a positive factor and should be encouraged more strongly.
3. The location of the College should be exploited more fully.
4. Innovative ways of introducing prospective students to Nasson should be employed in addition to the more traditional reliance on guidance counselors.
5. Research associated with this study in addition to the questionnaire indicated that attrition tends to be concentrated among the strongest and weakest students academically. Therefore, the faculty should have a special awareness of the extreme ends of the ability range of the student body in order to work with these two groups most effectively.
6. Special attention should be given to making the residence halls a more satisfactory environment for living and studying. The Office of Student Personnel should become more directly involved in both the initial planning and ultimate decisions with respect to residence hall improvements, expansion, renovation, and maintenance.

7. The residence hall counselor system is effective and should be supported and strengthened continuously.
8. Consideration should be given to enlarging the extracurricular activities (social, recreational, concert and lecture series, etc.) especially during weekends. An additional staff person be engaged to function in the office of Student Personnel as the Director of Student Activities or Assistant Dean of Students for Student Activities.
9. Faculty attitude and professionalism consistent with the small college concept is generally positive and should continue to be emphasized.
10. The study of the apparent need for adding more elective courses to the curriculum should be continued by the faculty.
11. Immediate attention should be given to defining, developing, and implementing an academic advisor program.

It should be noted that when the final report was disseminated to the College community all data, in percentage-per-category form, was included. It was felt that since each faculty member, by the inherent nature of his academic training, is constantly concerning himself with research analyses related to his respective field of concentration, he would prefer to approach the data that were presented from an individual and objective perspective.

Conclusion: Contrary to the College and university growth patterns which occurred during the 1950's and 1960's, the growth curve has recently begun to flatten its trajectory[8]. In many instances (most notably in private colleges and universities) maintaining operational enrollments has become a problem significant enough to warrent serious speculation and investigation[9].

The technique and instruments described in this study can, with minor adjustments, be broadly applied to institutions of higher learning that consider student attrition to be an actual or potential problem source. It can provide conclusive findings upon which an institution can base a program which has as its objective the decrease in student attrition through a concomitant emphasis placed upon institutional strengths and the identification and remediation of institutional weaknesses.

(Copies of the survey package can be obtained by writing to Dr. Bartholomew J. Ciampa, Director of Teacher Training and Associate Professor of Education, Nasson College, Springvale, Maine 04083.)

NOTES

1. "Proportion of Young Men in College Falls to Lowest Point Since 1964," in The Chronicle of Higher Education, (Washington, D. C.: March 5, 1973), p. 1

2. Richard E. Baldwin, "Down With the Degree Structure," in Change, (New Rochelle, N.Y.: March, 1973), pp. 50-55.

3. For example see College Level Examination Program, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey.

4. Julie G. McVay, "A Study of Prediction Equations for First-Year Success at North Carolina State University," in College and University, (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Winter, 1973), pp. 80-83.

5. See: W. C. Blanchfield, "College Dropout Identification: A Case Study," in The Journal of Experimental Education, (Madison, Wisconsin: Winter, 1971), pp. 1-4.

   - William G. Spady, "Dropouts from Higher Education: Toward an Empirical Model," in Interchange (Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, March, 1971) pp. 38-62.

   - D. Trapp, et. al., "Entrance Characteristics and Their Relationships," in Institutional Research and Institutional Policy Formulation: 11th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Claremont, Calif.: Office of Institutional Research, December, 1971), pp. 119-122.

6. Brian H. Burke, "Changing Needs in Transfer Admissions: Build Policy from the Data," in College and University, (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers) Winter, 1973), pp. 69-79.

7. Alexander W. Astin, College Dropouts: A National Profile, (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, Volume 7, Number 1, 1972).

8. Larry A. Van Dyne, "Enrollments Leveling Off at State Supported 4-year Colleges," in The Chronicle of Higher Education, (Washington, D. C.: January 15, 1973), p. 1.

9. William W. Jellema, The Numbers Game. A Study of Enrollment Patterns in Private Colleges and Universities, (Washington, D. C.: Association of American Colleges, January, 1972).

NASSON COLLEGE
SPRINGVALE, MAINE 04083

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 12, 1972

Because of the rapidly changing educational trends and world conditions, it is especially important that we continually evaluate and update our educational programs. As a former Nasson student you are in a position to render valuable assistance to us in this endeavor by completing the enclosed questionnaire.

When responding to the statements on the questionnaire, please remember that one of the important objectives of a Nasson education is the development of intelligent and creative citizenship, not only through the curriculum, but also through the larger laboratory of the campus with its varied experiences in democratic group living.

We very much appreciate your participation in this activity, and extend best wishes for your success in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

John S. Bailey

John S. Bailey
President

QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS:

After carefully reading each statement, please indicate your reaction by circling one of the five responses. If a statement does not seem pertinent to your experience at Nasson then circle No (No Opinion). The other four possible responses are:

SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

When you strongly agree or strongly disagree with a statement and wish to share your reason(s) with us, you may use the space provided immediately following each statement. Otherwise the space may be used for general comments.

Please complete and return the questionnaire in the envelope provided as promptly as possible but hopefully on or before August 14, 1972. Thank you for your assistance.

Name_____

Present Mailing address_____

Number of semesters enrolled_____. Academic Year(s)_____

1. I first heard about Nasson from:
   - Guidance counselor_____
   - Nasson student_____
   - Admissions representative_____
   - Friend_____
   - Parent of enrolled student_____
   - Alumnus_____
   - Other (please identify)_____

2. At the time I applied for admission Nasson was my first choice_____, second choice_____, third choice_____.

3. The Nasson publications are an accurate reflection of what the College is really like. SA A D SD NO

4. The Admissions Officers accurately represent what Nasson is really like. SA A D SD NO

5. The Admissions Officers were helpful and realistic when evaluating my chances for admission. SA A D SD NO

6. My interview was helpful to me because I learned more about the College which positively influenced my decision to attend. SA A D SD NO

7. The Admissions Officer who interviewed me seemed interested in learning what I was really like. SA A D SD NO

8. I was impressed by the College following my interview and tour of the campus. SA A D SD NO

9. The location was an important factor in my decision to attend. SA A D SD NO

10. I found the environment in which Nasson is located met my expectations. SA A D SD NO

11. While at Nasson, I received financial assistance from an outside agency (bank etc.) SA A D SD NO

12. The financial aid offered was adequate. SA A D SD NO

13. My high school rank in class, and grade point average were accurate measures of my scholastic ability while in high school. SA A D SD NO

14. My SAT scores (College Boards) accurately measured my academic potential. SA A D SD NO

15. My high school academic preparation was good and allowed me to make a successful academic transition from high school to college. SA A D SD NO

16. My guidance counselor was helpful in pointing out college options and specific colleges for me. SA A D SD NO

17. Before I enrolled, I believed that Nasson was a realistic academic choice for me. SA A D SD NO

18. While enrolled I continued to believe that Nasson was a realistic academic choice for me. SA A D SD NO

19. The required summer school program through which I entered Nasson was beneficial. SA A D SD NO

20. The cost was a pertinent factor in my decision to leave. SA A D SD NO

21. After leaving Nasson did you attend any other college or university? Yes _____ No_____

22. If so, what was the name of the institution?_____

23. Did you complete or are you completing the requirements for a degree at that same institution? Yes_____ No_____

24. If no, at what institution are you presently enrolled?_____

25. During my last semester at Nasson, I lived in_____ residence hall in a DOUBLE/SINGLE room.

26. I would have preferred however, to live in_____ residence hall because of its_____ _____

27. Generally speaking, the living environment in the residence hall was satisfactory. SA A D SD NO

28. I usually studied in my room. Yes_____ No_____

29. I usually studied in the Library. Yes_____ No_____

30. I usually studied in _____

31. While at Nasson, I had outside (non-academic) interests that occupied a considerable amount of my time. Yes_____ No_____.

32. Most of my friends had similar outside (non-academic) interests. SA A D SD NO

33. I would have preferred to live in an apartment off campus if it had been permissible. Yes_____ No_____

34. While at Nasson, my social life was important to me. _____ SA A D SD NO

35. The social life was satisfactory in that there was usually plenty to do during the evenings and on weekends. SA A D SD NO

36. Residence hall rules and regulations were too permissive in many instances. SA A D SD NO

37. Nasson's location is such that, as long as transportation is available, there are many recreational opportunities in the area. SA A D SD NO

38. Clubs and campus organizations offered activities that were of interest to me. SA A D SD NO

39. Community organizations offered activities that were of interest to me. SA A D SD NO

40. Of all the clubs and organizations on campus, the one I was most interested in was_____.

41. Of all the community organizations, the one I was most interested in was_____.

42. I experienced a sense of isolation from the "outside world" while at Nasson. SA A D SD NO

43. Any feeling of isolation was tempered by programs like the Concert-Lecture Series and other special programs and speakers. SA A D SD NO

44. Whenever I had the opportunity I would leave campus for the weekend. SA A D SD NO

45. Residence hall counselors were generally helpful when I had a problem or needed advice. SA A D SD NO

46. The Student Personnel Office was generally helpful when I had a problem or needed advice. SA A D SD NO

47. I rarely went to the Student Personnel Office because it was usually too crowded with other students and I didn't have time to wait. SA A D SD NO

48. The small College atmosphere at Nasson where I knew most of the people was important to me. SA A D SD NO

49. The small college atmosphere at Nasson where I knew most of the people proved helpful on many occations. SA A D SD NO

50. In general, the faculty was friendly and helpful. SA A D SD NO

51. I spoke frequently with my professors outside the classroom. SA A D SD NO

52. The faculty displayed enthusiasm about teaching and learning. SA A D SD NO

53. There was a high degree of student-instructor respect. SA A D SD NO

54. My professors were willing to admit their own shortcomings. SA A D SD NO

55. My professors were prompt and efficient. SA A D SD NO

56. The instructors' day-to-day preparations were adequate. SA A D SD NO

57. Students participated actively in class procedures. SA A D SD NO

58. The use of charts, films, slides, models, bulletins, etc, contributed to the success of my classes. SA A D SD NO

59. Tests were fair. SA A D SD NO

60. The number of tests was about right. SA A D SD NO

61. The assignment of written work was reasonable. SA A D SD NO

62. Tests and papers were returned promptly. SA A D SD NO

63. Grades were determined accurately and objectively. SA A D SD NO

64. My instructors had command of their subjects. SA A D SD NO

65. The instructors' knowledge and enthusiasm motivated me. SA A D SD NO

66. Faculty members showed considerable concern for their students' well-being. SA A D SD NO

67. The pace of the classes was about right. SA A D SD NO

68. I had the opportunity to choose from many elective courses. SA A D SD NO

69. I found my elective courses interesting. SA A D SD NO

70. The courses in which I enrolled were either my first or second choices. SA A D SD NO

71. The class sizes were neither too small nor large. SA A D SD NO

72. My faculty advisor helped me to choose my courses. SA A D SD NO

73. My faculty advisor was helpful in a variety of other ways. SA A D SD NO

74. Required courses occupied most of my academic time. SA A D SD NO

75. I found the courses in my major interesting. SA A D SD NO

76. I should have chosen my major earlier. SA A D SD NO

77. I should have chosen another major. SA A D SD NO

78. My classes were scheduled at reasonable times. SA A D SD NO

79. In general, my courses were rigorous. SA A D SD NO

80. In general, the purposes of my courses were clear. SA A D SD NO

81. Course assignments were clear and challenging. SA A D SD NO